

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FOR THE TAKOMA PARK RECREATION CENTER

Final Report:
Review of Process,
Findings and Recommendations

Submission Date: May 10, 2021



engage
Takoma Park



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreward	3
Acknowledgements	4
About Brick & Story	5
Why Now?	6
The Charge	7
The Engagement Process: Approach, Tools, and Outcomes	8
• Phase 1: Define the Landscape & Develop the Approach	
• Phase 2a: Launch Events	
• Phase 2b: Visioning & Goal Setting	
• Phase 3: Defining Community Priorities	
Engagement Tools	26
• Social Media	
• Pop-Ups and Other Forms of Direct Outreach	
Findings & Recommendations	28
Next Steps: Beyond This Process	30
Appendix A: Notes from Launch Events	A1
Appendix B: Notes from Visioning & Goal Setting Sessions	A2
Appendix C: Survey Data	A3
Appendix D: Social Media Report	A4

FOREWARD

In an effort to both reimagine the possibilities for the Takoma Park Recreation Center and engage the residents of Takoma Park in a more inclusive, meaningful way, the City of Takoma Park issued a Request for Proposals in December 2019 for a Community Engagement Consultant to help design and implement a comprehensive engagement process that would serve two purposes: 1) to determine community priorities for a new recreation center, and 2) to offer recommendations for how engagement can happen effectively across the city going forward for future public efforts.

DC-based consultancy Brick & Story was selected for this engagement in March 2020; in fact, Council approved the contract the night before it formally shut down all in-person operations due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. In response to the growing public health crisis and an inability to connect through traditional, in-person means of engagement, Brick & Story worked with the City of Takoma Park to adapt our initial strategies to accommodate virtual and socially-distanced engagement, and these approaches are outlined

in this report. Although the techniques were adapted and modified, the underlying premise of engagement remained true throughout the entire process - to create an invitation that was welcoming, inclusive, and intentionally targeted to communities in Takoma Park that are not traditionally represented in the public process.

In addition to an overview of the engagement process Brick & Story employed and the preferences and priorities for a new recreation center that were gathered from residents from across the city, this report also offers recommendations on tools, best practices, and next steps for how the city can conduct engagement more effectively going forward. As our team has observed in this process, Takoma Park is a "Tale of Two Cities" with very clear, stark divides across lines of race and class. Understanding how to provide multiple platforms for diverse voices in the city and how to elevate those voices that often remain unheard will be critical for the success of any engagement effort deployed in the future and, in turn, will make for a more dynamic and inclusive Takoma Park.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In addition to our thanks and gratitude to the City of Takoma Park for giving Brick & Story the opportunity to work on this project, we would like to extend our sincere appreciation to the organizations, agencies, and residents who helped to share and promote the engagement process across the various communities within Takoma Park:

- » **Takoma Park City Council**
- » **The Friends of the Takoma Park Recreation Center**
- » **City of Takoma Park Recreation Department**
- » **Takoma Park Public Library**
- » **Takoma Langley Crossroads Development Authority**
- » **Takoma Park Youth Council**
- » **Takoma Park Public Schools**
- » **Ms. Doris Duarte, Resident, Hampshire Towers Apartments**
- » **Ms. Erin Serrano, Property Manager, Takoma Overlook Condominium**
- » **Main Street Takoma**
- » **Crossroads Business District**
- » **Takoma Park Newsletter**
- » **Property Management at the Park Ritchie Apartments**
- » **Property Management at Edinburgh House, Blair Park, Hancock Apartments, and Sligo Apartments**
- » **Seble Seyoum, Enterprise Community Development**
- » **Chris Lesesne, Don Bosco Cristo Rey High School**
- » **Chalk Riot**
- » **Shepherds of Zion Ministries International Church**
- » **Source of Spring**
- » **Susan Ewing**
- » **Pam Sparr**
- » **Gil Winters**
- » **Meg Kiernan**
- » **Bedell Gbutukla**

— ABOUT BRICK & STORY

Brick & Story is a DC-based urban consultancy practice focused on telling the stories of the built environment and the people who live, work, and play within its spaces. In finding creative ways to tell these stories, Brick & Story provides engagement and community-building strategy, creative communication and storytelling services, and urban planning expertise to municipalities, for-profit and non-profit developers, architects, consultants, and communities working in the built environment.

LaToya Thomas

Principal &
Founder

Yerodin Avent

Community
Builder

Molly Jamison Juarez

Community Engagement/
Spanish Liaison

Anna Rozzo

Community Engagement/
French Liaison

Mariam Bekele

Community Engagement/
Amharic Liaison

Carolina Cabezas Tadesse

Community Engagement/
Spanish Liaison



Learn more about us at
brickandstory.com

WHY NOW?

The City of Takoma Park intends to redevelop the Takoma Park Recreation Center located at 7315 New Hampshire Avenue in Ward 6.

In July 2019, the City of Takoma Park, in collaboration with Montgomery County Parks Department, finalized the transfer of ownership of the property to the City of Takoma Park, in exchange for the vacant, City-owned parcel at 922 Jackson Avenue, part of the Long Branch Stream Valley park. This land swap created a new amenity in the City's real estate portfolio and offered an opportunity to explore redevelopment potential on the site.

The recreation center is sited within the study area of the Takoma Langley Crossroads Sector Plan. The Plan recommends the replacement of the Recreation Center due to its age, poor condition, inefficient layout and limited capacity. The facility, constructed in approximately 1970, is located on a 1.86 acre site, less than ½ mile from the planned Takoma Langley Crossroads stop on the future Purple Line light rail system. The location of the recreation site, which is in close proximity to the county line, affects perceptions of who the recreation center is designed to serve.

At the release of the RFP, the population of Takoma Park was approximately 17,500 people, the majority being people of color: 34%

Black/African/African American, 14.5% Hispanic or Latinx, 4.4% Asian, 43.3% white, and 3.8% Other. The housing make-up of the City is nearly an even split with 53% of homes owner-occupied and the remaining 47% occupied by renters.

The City's primary objective of this effort was to begin an equitable community engagement process that educated the residents of Takoma Park - and particularly those in the Ward 6 community - on the development process and captured the needs and preferences for a new recreation center so that the City can implement a collaborative process as this site is redeveloped. The community residing near the recreation center is incredibly diverse in terms of race, income, age, family size and composition, and housing tenure; however, the diversity of this community is often not reflected in civic life and among the voices that typically are heard in the public realm. This process sought to find creative ways to engage more of this community and other underrepresented voices (Black/African/African American and Hispanic/Latinx, immigrant populations, and renters) into the conversation.

As of the release of this report, the City of Takoma Park is crafting a Request for Proposals to issue to the development community by January 2022.

THE CHARGE

The City of Takoma Park defined five (5) clear goals for this engagement:

1

Educate residents about the development process and therefore empower them to participate in the community engagement process.

2

Create and execute an inclusive community engagement process that responds to the communication styles and languages of the residents. The prevailing languages in the City are English, Spanish, Amharic, and French.

3

Include engaging and innovative vehicles for education and feedback that go beyond or enhance the effectiveness of traditional community meetings.

4

Introduce concepts of civic engagement and resident empowerment through education and knowledge sharing while seeking opportunities, when possible, to bolster residents' long-term engagement with the City beyond this project

5

Develop a comprehensive report of community needs and preferences for the Recreation Center site.

Lastly, because the Recreation Center is sited along a corridor that has not seen any significant economic development in decades, the City wished to explore the possibility of mixed-use development (rather than the traditional, one-story recreation center design program) in the engagement process. Brick & Story was encouraged to introduce mixed-use concepts that included housing and retail into the engagement process as a way to explore how the Recreation Center redevelopment could begin to introduce economic opportunity, such as affordable homeownership and space for small, local businesses, into the larger dialogue.

THE ENGAGEMENT PROCESS: APPROACH, TOOLS, AND OUTCOMES

The engagement process was designed in three (3) phases to allow us to understand **WHO** makes up the City of Takoma Park and what different methods we would need to deploy in order to connect with residents. These phases, which are outlined below, centered on the initial step of developing a meaningful and intentional invitation to the process that would allow all residents in Takoma Park to feel that this process was designed for them.

The Impacts of COVID-19

It is important to note that the primary challenge when we began our work was the unexpected and prolonged nature of COVID-19 and its related impacts - in particular, the limitations on conducting direct, in-person outreach due to public health restrictions in place. This challenge forced us to revisit traditional recommendations of engagement that we would have normally deployed (e.g. door knocking, in-person and on-site engagement opportunities) and design new engagement mechanisms to reach a broad network of residents.

A related challenge from COVID-19 was, and continues to be, the capacity limitations of residents, organizations, and most other people who are naturally and understandably juggling unexpected obligations due to COVID-19. Parents became home-school teachers overnight, and community partners and social service organizations had to shift their focus to ensuring that families were healthy, had access to masks and hand sanitizer, and had food and financial resources to weather the storm of job losses that erupted overnight. Engaging people in a conversation about a recreation center redevelopment when they were simply trying to focus on survival was something our team was very much attune to as we began our work, particularly because many of the people who typically are not part of the public process were also the people who experienced the most dramatic effects of COVID-19.

| Phases of Engagement



Phase 1: Define the Landscape & Develop the Approach

Understanding the limitations posed by COVID-19, our team worked collaboratively with the City of Takoma Park during the Spring and Summer of 2020 to learn the existing networks that existed to connect with residents across the city, as well as to identify key individuals and organizations that may serve as good partners for us as we began to outreach to residents. Some of our early engagement efforts included conversations with residents and property management from the Hampshire Tower Apartments and Takoma Overlook Condominium on the Recreation Center Campus, as well as the neighboring Hillwood Manor Apartments. These communities were identified as some of our high priority residents to ensure they had an opportunity to participate in this process. These early efforts also allowed us to connect with residents in communities surrounding the recreation center, including those in the Hillwood Manor neighborhood and other parts of the Ward 6 community. This outreach was significant because it helped us to understand the different populations that comprise Takoma Park and the different ways that people access information.

At the same time, we also began to explore how to integrate digital platforms into our engagement process. The City of Takoma Park had recently been accepted into the 2020 City Innovate Cohort for a Start-Up In Residence (STiR) pilot to integrate new technology platforms

into their municipal operations through partnerships with technology developers, and this program allowed them to partner with Kuorum, a Spain-based company that develops web-based platforms for municipalities to conduct community engagement using tools such as surveys, newsletters, and participatory budgeting. We spent the first several months of the project working with Kuorum to learn the platform (which was branded “Engage Takoma Park” for this project) and understand how to integrate this into our engagement process. We also spent time exploring how to best leverage other virtual platforms, such as Zoom, to conduct engagement that would normally occur in person.

By Fall 2020, based on the relationships we had made to date and the information gathered, we began to design the framework for an engagement process that would:

- » Be largely virtual in nature
- » Include limited, socially-distant outreach opportunities at targeted sites
- » Integrate with other City communication networks, including the Department of Parks and Recreation, Takoma Park Public Schools, and the Takoma Park Public Library
- » Support a variety of ways to engage for all ages
- » Intentionally target Ward 6 residents, neighboring residents, and other residents who are least represented in civic life

Phase 2a: Launch Events

In September 2020, Brick & Story formally initiated the engagement process for the Takoma Park Recreation Center with a series of launch events (1 in person, 2 virtual). This launch served to:

- » **Invite residents into the engagement process**
- » **Connect residents with the City to learn more about the development process and next steps**
- » **Pose questions about building design, programming, and community resources that would spark idea generation and conversation**

The in-person launch event was held in the parking lot of the Takoma Park Recreation Center on September 19, 2020, from 10:00 am until 1:00 pm. The engagement experience was designed around “stations” that participants self-navigated. The start of the experience included stations to introduce residents to the City’s proposed development process. Then, residents engaged in prompts that reflected stated values from Takoma Park’s Housing and Economic Development Strategic Plan such as inclusivity, safety, and sustainability. Residents

were able to express their input regarding the application of these values in the redevelopment of the Recreation Center as well as general questions about , programming, use, and design. Approximately 40 people were in attendance and represented a range of ages - from young children to seniors. . The demographic representation of the attendees was also diverse, with a significant number of residents of color and non- or limited-English speakers in attendance.

Following the in-person launch event, 2 virtual launch events were hosted on Zoom and offered a modified version of the in-person event, with similar prompts and opportunities for residents to express priorities and opinions.

We carefully transcribed and coded the feedback from these events to represent trends and repeated requests. As a result of these community engagement opportunities we were able to synthesize community priorities into categories of need which scaffolded the visioning and goal-setting phase which followed.

For a more detailed summary of the results from the Launch Events, please see Appendix A.

Phase 2a: Launch Events

Partnership with Chalk Riot

Brick & Story also worked with local muralist, Chalk Riot, to explore ways to creatively integrate art into this engagement process.

As part of the launch event, Chalk Riot designed a vibrant mural that focused on the theme of “Growing Takoma Park Together”. The mural, which is highlighted on the cover of this report, showcases official flowers, animals, and plants representing the many cultures and countries that make up the beautiful cultural fabric of the city. The image of the bird watering the plants speaks to the city’s collective responsibility to help each other grow and prosper.

This mural and related theme was birthed at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, when a significant portion of both the local and global population were experiencing housing and food insecurity, as well as illness and death. This mural captures the essence of community - the ability to come together in the most difficult of times to support and care for each other.

Participants in the launch event were invited to respond to the following prompts by writing on paper leaves that could be affixed to the mural:

- What are the ingredients of being a good Neighbor?
- What are the building blocks of Takoma Park / what makes up the foundation of Takoma Park?
- What do you want to grow (more of) in Takoma Park?
- What seeds do we need to plant for the future in Takoma Park?
- What are your special cultural traditions that add to Takoma Park’s unique fabric?

The mural was constructed on a wooden board that can be moved and installed easily. This portable design allows it to be placed inside the future recreation center to continue to lift and honor the resident engagement and input in the redevelopment process. As part of the launch event, the mural was installed on the exterior of the recreation center on a wall that faces the Hampshire Tower Apartments community, thus allowing residents to view the art from their homes. In addition to providing a new, artistic element to an aging facility, this mural also provides a sense of the beauty and excitement of what is to come - a new recreation center.

Phase 2b: Visioning and Goal Setting

From October - November 2020, the engagement process shifted to focus on deeper idea generation with residents. The team hosted nearly 15 virtual sessions focused on "Visioning and Goal Setting" which allowed residents to explore the possibilities around building design, and programming, as well as discuss how a new Recreation Center could serve as a community resource.

These sessions posed questions around design and programming concerns that were important to the community. Since this was the only portion of engagement that talked extensively about design considerations, we have highlighted several key themes that came from the discussions below:

- » A gym/court with adequate seating is highly desired
- » Desire for a space that is filled with light, as the current recreation center feels very closed off and dark
- » Integrate nature or the natural landscape into the building design and programming
- » Consider designing indoor/outdoor flex space (either at grade or on upper floor or rooftop)
- » Interest in a mixed-use design program from many participants, with concern expressed around building height and loss of

recreation programming space to make space for other non-recreation uses

- » Consider design technologies that can help to absorb sound
- » Provide large entry spaces that flow to avoid backups of visitors (particularly children/youth) as they arrive to the center
- » Use natural and sustainable materials in the building design
- » Create well-designed spaces that are also functional

A detailed summary of responses from the Visioning and Goal Setting sessions is available as Appendix B.

In addition to the virtual sessions we hosted, our team also hosted limited in-person outreach opportunities and partnered with the City to participate in outdoor citywide events, including a Halloween pop-up at the Cambridge Apartments, where we were able to share information with families about the recreation center engagement process and how to get involved as well as collect contact information that allowed us to maintain contact throughout the process.

Lastly, we launched a Citywide Community Art Contest for all ages and for all art forms to allow residents to illustrate artistically what they wanted to see in a new recreation center. Entries were received from all ages, with themes centered on building design elements, gathering spaces, music, art, and culture.

Phase 3: Defining Community Priorities

In February 2020, we launched the final phase of engagement, “Defining Community Priorities”. In this phase, we gathered the “wishlist” that had been generated during the Visioning and Goal Setting phase and asked residents to prioritize what they wanted to see in recreation center amenities, programming, and building design. We also asked extensive demographic questions in order to understand who we were and were not reaching through the survey.

The survey was launched on Engage Takoma Park using a Google Form survey format. It was offered in the 4 identified main languages: English, Spanish, French, and Amharic. The survey was also distributed via the existing communication networks managed by:

- » **City of Takoma Park Recreation Department**
- » **Takoma Park Public Schools**
- » **City of Takoma Park Economic Development Division**
- » **Takoma Park Public Library**

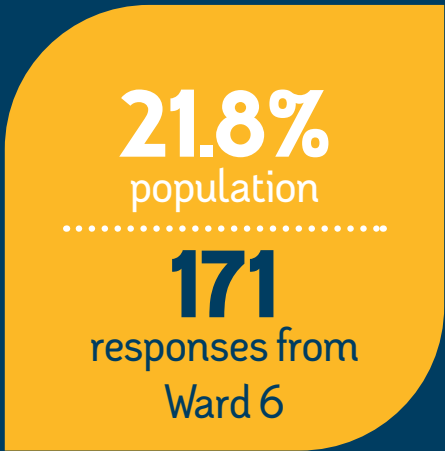
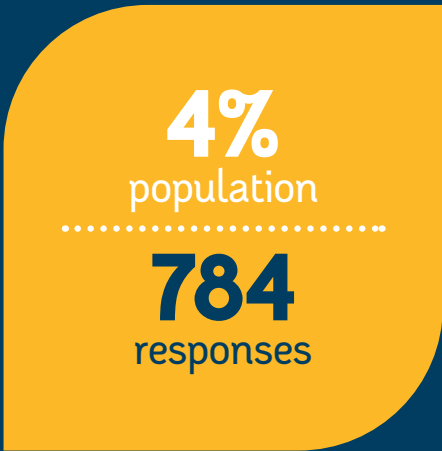
Additionally, hardcopies of the survey were provided across nearly 20 multifamily buildings throughout the City. We also included a flyer and survey as an insert in the March monthly newsletter that reaches approximately 11,700 addresses. Drop Boxes were made available for the collection of hard copy surveys at several locations, including the Takoma Park Police Station, Hampshire Towers Apartments, and Takoma Overlook. Some apartment communities we worked with for distribution, such as the Park Ritchie Apartments, also setup dropboxes in their lobby or leasing office. Others, such as Essex House, allowed us to do an in-person pop-up in the lobby where we were able to connect with residents in the evening hours to help them complete the survey.

We also provided a phone line for residents to call in with questions and/or to complete the survey by phone. This line allowed for survey completion with interpretation for speakers of other languages; it also provided us the opportunity to answer questions about the survey throughout the process.

Highlights from the community survey follow this section. A detailed review of the data is available in Appendix C.



Recreation Center



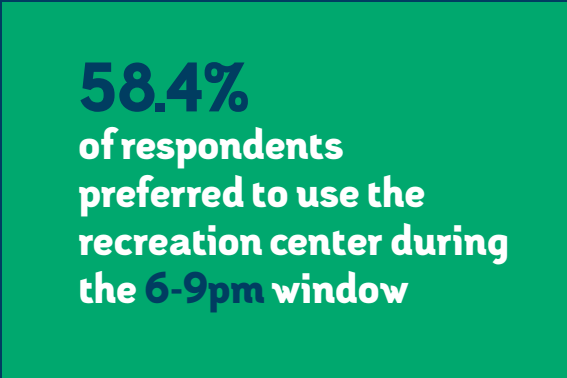
Top 3 considerations that would increase usage of recreation center:



- 90.7% are comfortable paying a fee to access recreation center programs
- 83.2% are comfortable paying a fee to access recreation center spaces

Of those who NEVER USED THE RECREATION CENTER

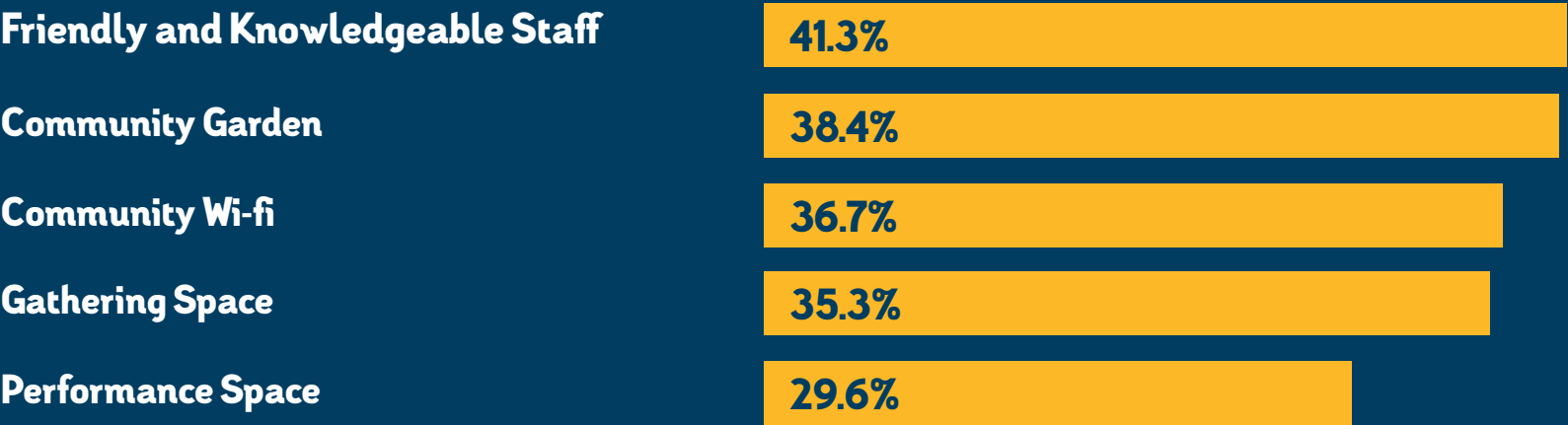
- 9% claimed a need for better publicity of the center and its offerings (3% of whom claimed they didn't know it existed)
- 12.9% want better transportation access to site (including parking)





Community Resources

Top 5 preferred community resources



.....

For those who NEVER USED THE RECREATION CENTER BEFORE, preferences include:

- Top interests same as all responses
 1. Community Garden
 2. Friendly & Knowledgeable Staff
 3. Gathering space
 4. Community Wifi
- Over **5%** Over 5% were less interested in a senior room and teen space of respondents who never used center in comparison to all responses

RENTERS VS. HOMEOWNERS

- **Renters** identify stronger preferences for community garden, community wifi, senior room, access to healthcare, and a quiet room
- **Homeowners** identify stronger preferences for multi-use/flexspace classrooms, performance space, and large community meetings

INTERESTS BROKEN DOWN BY RACE/ETHNIC GROUPS

- **Teen space** is significantly more desired by those of Hispanic and other/mixed race/ethnicity
- **Childcare** is highly desired by Hispanics and least desired by Native Hawaiian
- **Performance space** is more desired by those of Asian, Native Hawaiian, and Mixed/Other race/ethnicity than by those who identify as White, Black/African, or Hispanic
- **A senior room** is most desired by those of Native Hawaiian ethnicity

WHEN BROKEN DOWN BY AGE GROUPS

- **18-24** year olds are least interested in Multi-use/flexspace classrooms (only 7.3%, in comparison to the overall 26% of all respondents) and in playgrounds (9.8% compared to overall 26.8%), although they are interested in childcare; they are also significantly less interested in a community garden than the 25-64 age groups
- **65+** care the most about friendly and knowledgeable staff, and a senior room

WHEN COMPARING RESPONDENTS BASED ON DISTANCE TO REC CENTER

- **Walkers** are more interested in community garden, gathering space, and playground; also prioritized friendly staff, access to healthcare screenings, multi-use space, childcare, & large community rooms
- **Drivers** (>1.0 mi) have the same top 4 interests as the overall respondents (1. friendly staff, 2. Community garden, 3. Community wifi, and 4. Gathering space). They are more interested in teen space and a senior room than walkers.
- **Walkers** have significantly more ideas beyond the options offered in the survey than drivers; some ideas included: Dog park, Kids sports space; comments on cleanliness and facility specifics



Fitness

Top 4 preferred uses for Fitness

- Fitness equipment (e.g. cardio)
- Pool/Splash Park
- Thai Chi and/or Yoga
- Weight room or equipment (e.g. weights and related strength training equipment)

58.2%

48.7%

44%

42.2%

.....

For those who have NEVER USED THE RECREATION CENTER BEFORE:

- Top interests same as all responses -
 1. Pool
 2. Fitness equipment
 3. Weight room or equipment
 4. Tai chi and/or yoga
- Least interested in Athletic team practices, sports or fitness activities, and bone builders classes (same as all respondents)

FITNESS FOR RENTERS VS. HOMEOWNERS

- **Renters** have stronger preferences for athletic team practices, lockers and showers, and other sports or fitness activities
- **Homeowners** have stronger preferences for tai chi and/or yoga, and a slightly higher preference for a pool or splash park

FITNESS BY RACE

- **Basketball** court is much higher for Black, mixed/other, and Hispanic than for White, Asian, and Native Hawaiian
- **Climbing wall** preferred by Asian, Native Hawaiian, and Mixed/Other groups, but not by White, Black, or Hispanic respondents
- **Native Hawaiian** is the only group who does not prioritize a Pool or splash park, nor weight room or equipment (only 17% want a pool, compared to 49% of overall respondents, and only 24% wanted weight room, compared to 42% of overall respondents); They are also the only group to highly prioritize athletic team practices (41% marked as preference, compared of overall 15% of all respondents)

FITNESS BY AGE

- **18-24** year olds is the only group with HIGH preferences for athletic team practices and with LOW preference for weight room
- **25-44** year olds, followed by the 45-64 group, are most interested in a pool or splash park
- **65+** are most interested in senior activities and thai chi/yoga; they are least interested in athletic teams, climbing wall, and ice rink

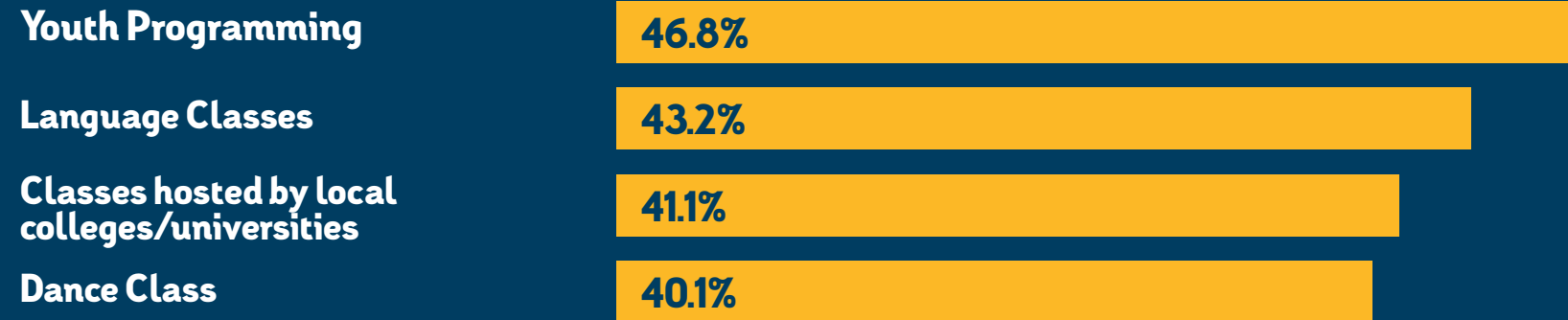
FITNESS BY DISTANCES

- No significant differences in top rankings
- **Walkers** are slightly more interested in pool, fitness equipment, weight room, and basketball court
- **Drivers** are slightly more interested in ice rink, athletic team practices, climbing wall, and dance room



Educational Uses

Top 4 preferred educational uses



For those who have NEVER USED THE RECREATION CENTER BEFORE:

- Top interests are same (slightly different order)-
 1. Language classes
 2. Youth programming
 3. Dance classes
 4. Classes hosted by colleges/universities
- Least interested in education on healthy cooking, current event discussion, and library annex
- Significantly more interested in artist residency than overall responses (35% vs. 29.3%)

EDUCATION FOR RENTERS VS. HOMEOWNERS

- Most significant difference in education on cooking and/or healthy eating (priority for 30.9% of renters vs. 15.8% of **homeowners**)
- Less significant differences in priorities - **renters** prefer library classes, current event discussion, and language classes more than owners; owners prefer artist residency more than renters

EDUCATION BY RACE

- Youth program and language classes are priorities for all races except **Native Hawaiian**
- Library classes in top 4 priorities for all races EXCEPT **White and Asian**; this pushed the category out of top 4 for overall responses
- **Asian** respondents were the only ones to identify both cooking classes and artist residency as top priorities

EDUCATION BY AGE

- Dance classes and Language classes are the only two categories identified as priorities for **all age** groups
- Younger families are more interested in library classes (**18-44**); older families more interested in youth programming (**25-64**)
- **45+** were the only group to prioritize classes hosted by colleges/universities as high priority
- Artist residency is only a top priority for **65+** age range; significantly low priority for ages **18-24** (12.2% compared to 29.3% overall responses)

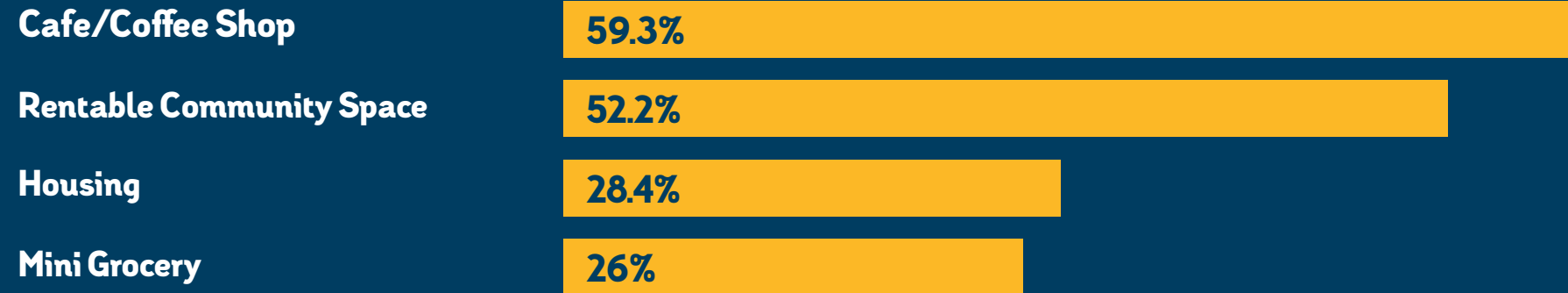
EDUCATION BY DISTANCES

- Biggest differences are for language classes (**52.5% walkers, 41.2% drivers**) and library annex (**30.2% walkers, 16.6% drivers**)
- Less significant differences in priorities: **walkers** more strongly prefer youth programming, classes from colleges/universities, and cultural education; **drivers** more strongly prefer dance classes



Economic Development

Top 4 preferred economic development opportunities



Of those who NEVER USED THE RECREATION CENTER

- Same top three priorities; 4th priority **Rentable Athletic Fields** followed by a **Mini Grocery**

RENTERS VS HOMEOWNERS

- Biggest difference: 44% of renters vs 24.2% of **homeowners** prioritized housing
- Less significant differences: more renters prioritized **rentable** community rooms and businesses spaces in comparison to homeowners; more homeowners prioritized cafe/coffee shop, public-private partnership, and rentable athletic fields compared to renters

AGE

- **18-24 year olds** prioritized business space more than rentable community space
- Younger (**18-44 year olds**) prioritized mini grocery while older (45+) prioritized rentable athletic fields

DISTANCE

- Most significant differences: drivers indicate stronger preference for housing (30.7% of drivers vs. 18% of walkers prioritized housing); walkers indicate stronger preferences for cafe/coffee shop (57.1% walkers vs. 29.8% drivers), rentable community rooms (61.2% walkers vs 50.2% drivers), and mini grocery (34.5% walkers vs 24.2% drivers)



Design

Significant Responses pertaining to Design

Recreation center should be designed sustainably

87.7% important or very important

Physical Design is important to attracting a diverse array of residents to use the recreation center

82.2% important or very important

Physical design is important to attract future economic development

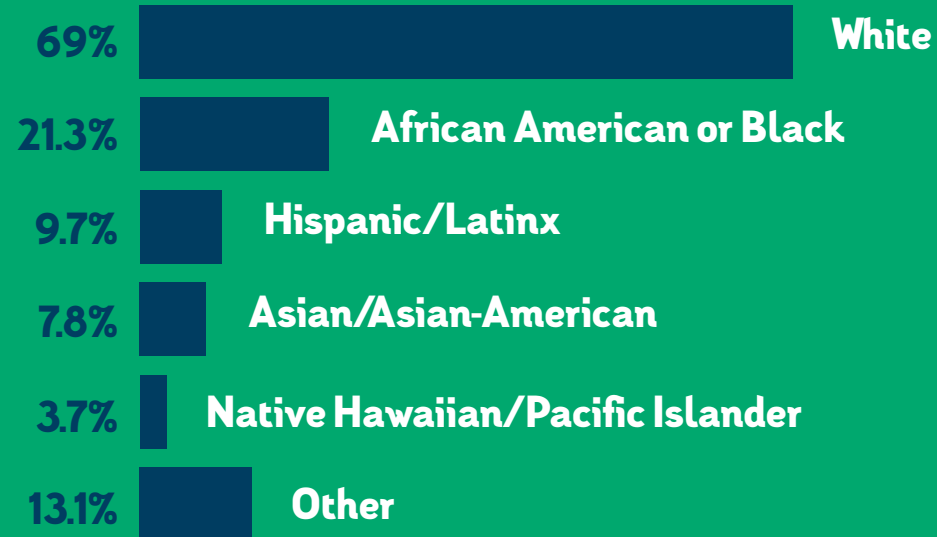
76.7% important or very important

-
- Physical design is more important to a higher percentage of residents who live within a half mile of the recreation center than for those who live at a farther distance

Demographics



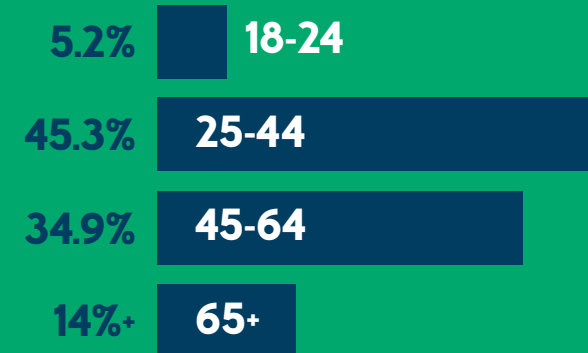
Race



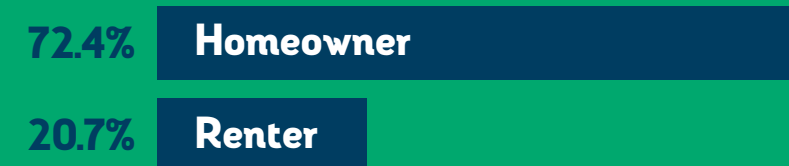
• 13.6% of respondents indicated more than 1 race/ethnicity



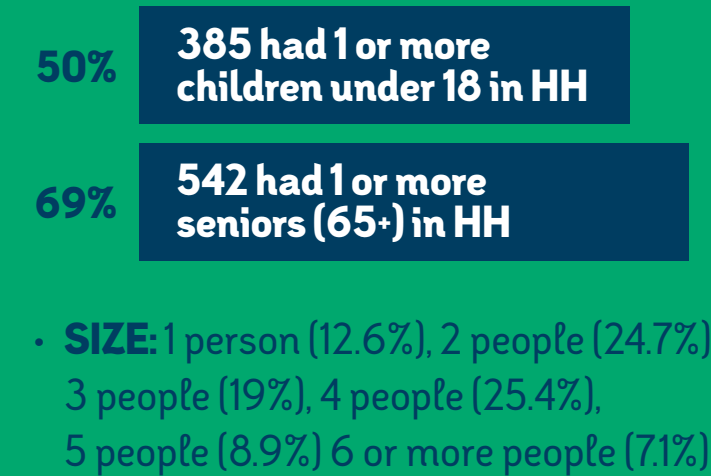
Age



Housing Tenure



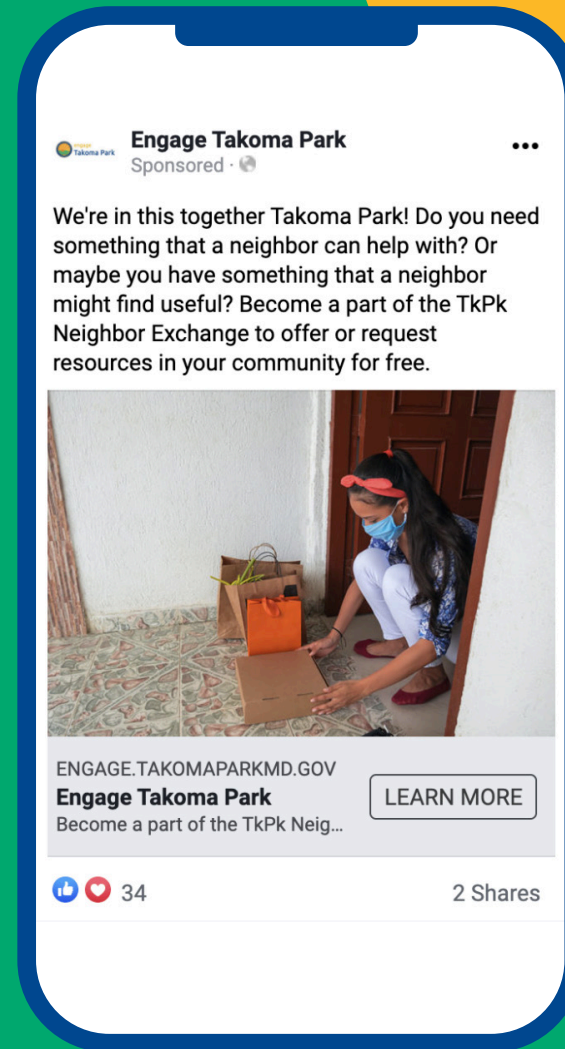
Household



— ENGAGEMENT TOOLS - A RESOURCE GUIDE

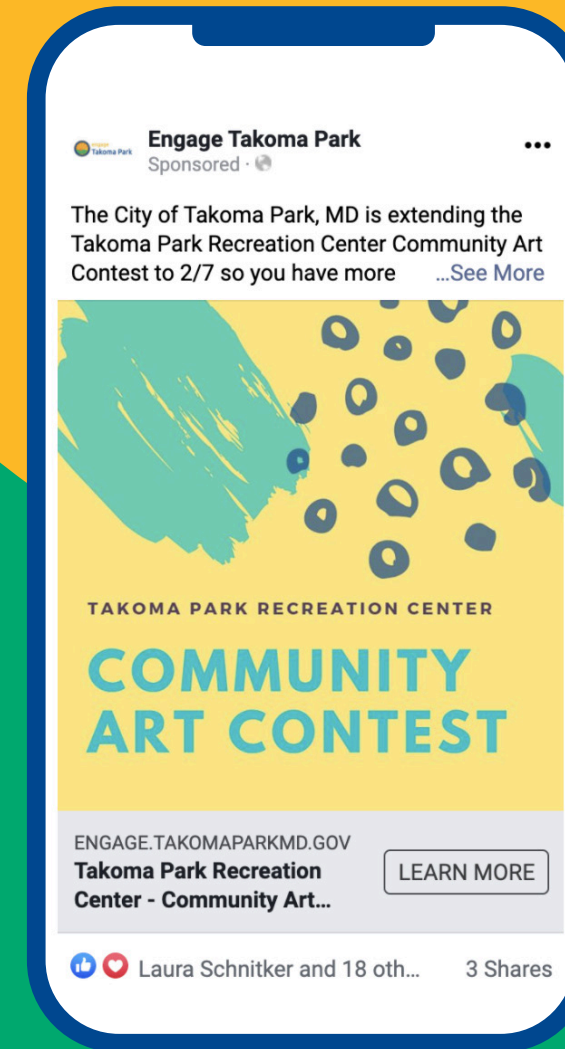
Social Media →

- Created the Engage Takoma Park Facebook group July 20, 2020 and gained 40 followers since then
- Ran 3 social media ad campaigns



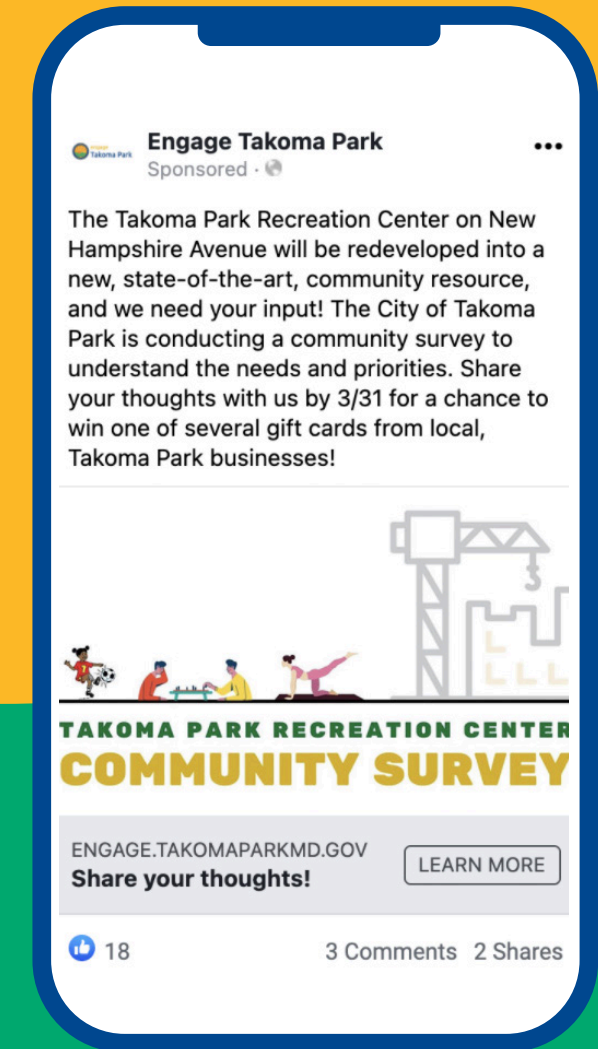
Neighbor Exchange

Resulting in **266** link clicks to engage.takomapark.md.gov and **8,534** people reached using a budget of **\$100**



Art Contest

Resulting in **214** link clicks and **7,550** people reached with a budget of **\$160.16**



Community Survey

Resulting in **352** link clicks and **10,441** people reached with a budget of **\$467.41**

ENGAGEMENT TOOLS - A RESOURCE GUIDE

Pop-Ups and Other Forms of Direct Outreach

- Virtual platforms proved to be an effective way to reach some, but not all, Takoma Park residents
- Pop-ups were leveraged heavily to target specific communities
- Other preferred direct outreach strategies, such as door knocking, were not deployed due to COVID-19 restrictions but are recommended for future engagement efforts

Engagement comes in many forms, as COVID-19 has taught us all too well.

Traditional in-person meetings were not feasible for the duration of this engagement process, so we had to adapt our approach to accommodate the gathering restrictions that were in place. Meetings were designed to happen virtually using Zoom, and this allowed us to provide multiple meeting times throughout the engagement process - which in turn allowed many people to participate in the process who might normally have done so because of childcare issues or other scheduling constraints. **We strongly recommend continuing to offer public engagement opportunities virtually**, in addition to in-person, in order to increase the amount of public participation from a diverse array of residents across the city.

We also noted that many residents were not engaging virtually - either due to technology access issues, language barriers, or scheduling conflicts. Targeted pop-ups that included a simple setup of a table, flyers, swag (masks and hand sanitizers for this effort), and discussion questions, were deployed in various settings across the city, including apartment communities, farmers' markets, and city-sponsored events. These pop-ups were primarily hosted outdoors and provided informal opportunities for us to engage with residents. **We strongly recommend continuing to leverage targeted pop-up events to support engagement across the city.** We also believe this tool will help to "bring the city to the people" and make government and civic life more accessible to all.

Finally, **we recommend the continued use of the Engage Takoma Park web platform** for this and other city initiatives. The platform should be used in conjunction with other tools such as social media, the City's website, and other established communication tools so that residents are encouraged to visit and use the platform.

FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Recreation Center - Key Findings

The following are key global findings and recommendations to consider in the development of the new recreation center based on feedback received to date:

- 1 Explore **better branding opportunities** for the Recreation Center that make it known and distinct from the Community Center on Maple Ave.
- 2 There is **appetite for a range of uses** as part of a new recreation center program (mix of recreation, educational, and communal/gathering uses desired)
- 3 Access issues, such as **hours of operation, transportation access to the center, and fees**, are significant when thinking about future use.
- 4 The new recreation center needs to be a center for **all-ages**.
- 5 There is interest among the community for a **mixed-use facility** that can provide recreation uses AND other non-recreation uses and amenities, but robust and innovative recreation center programming should still be a top priority.

FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are recommendations for how to pursue community engagement beyond this process. These strategies, we hope, will make for more intentional and inclusive processes going forward.

- 1 **Connections and Relational Capital are KEY** - make and maintain connections with city stakeholders in order to bring more residents into the public process
 - Leverage Property Managers at multifamily properties, Churches, resident leaders, and local organizations to maintain connections in the broader community.
 - Nurture the relationship between city agencies and share communication networks in order to reach more residents.

- 2 **Hire designated city staff to maintain and nurture stakeholder relationships across the city**
 - These staff should serve as Cultural Ambassadors/Community Liaisons rather than Language Translators. This shows that the city recognizes the importance of this work and is willing to invest in order to prioritize maintaining relationships with all groups throughout the city.

- 3 **Identify Community Liaisons who can work specifically with the Spanish-speaking community**
 - Trust is a big issue in the Hispanic/Latinx community. Work not only with property managers, but also local businesses, organizations, and schools to connect and begin building trusted relationships with Spanish-speaking residents.
 - Partner with organizations already working with this community.

- 4 **Maintain** Engage Takoma Park and improve linkage to other City platforms
 - Integrate Engage Takoma Park into City website/social media platforms AND leverage for other future city initiatives as a managed forum for resident engagement. While the tool may have nuances around use, it is only as good as the number of residents who are signed up to use it.
 - Do not focus SOLELY on these platforms - recognize that a large percentage of the population will not engage virtually - leverage existing systems and consider additional ways to engage by phone, in person, written materials, etc.

- 5 **INVEST** in time and a variety of tools for future engagement and **COMMIT** to an intentional city-wide engagement framework
 - Virtual engagement opportunities work for some but not all
 - Bring engagement to the people
 - Engagement = Trust = TIME

- 6 **Honest recognition by the City of Takoma Park of a "Tale of Two Cities" problem and develop (and implement) strategies to address**
 - Acknowledge that there is differing access to civic engagement and city amenities depending on where residents live, and that geographic differences in Takoma Park also translate into racial and socio-economic divides as well.
 - Explore ways to make civic leadership more representative of the city's residents AND more welcoming of those residents in civic life.

NEXT STEPS: BEYOND THIS PROCESS

The next phase in the redevelopment of the recreation center is the development and issuance of a Request for Proposal to the larger development community. While the development process continues, however, we know that development takes time, and a new recreation center is still a few years away from being realized.

So, what is possible NOW?

Brick & Story offers a few next steps for consideration as the City of Takoma Park explores not only how to keep the conversation about the recreation center alive, but also how to creatively use this moment of economic recovery post-COVID-19 to launch better city-wide engagement approaches in the near term.

1 Develop a Stakeholder Network that can be launched with key partners (property managers, resident leaders, organizations) from this process. Begin relationship-building with this group as a way to expand connections with residents across the city. This effort can be managed/facilitated by city staff or an outside partner.

2 Build bridges in the Hispanic/Latinx community, including with local businesses (e.g. Megamart) and other organizations that work

with this population regularly. This effort can be managed/facilitated by city staff or an outside partner.

3 Develop and adopt a City of Takoma Park Engagement Framework that can guide engagement on all city processes going forward. This effort can be managed/facilitated by city staff or an outside partner.

4 Develop training materials for future City-hired Community Liaisons. These materials may include, but not be limited to, a City-adopted engagement framework, a comprehensive contact list of stakeholder contacts across the city, and a map to understand demographics across the city. This effort can be managed/facilitated by city staff or an outside partner.

5 Explore ways to implement resident preferences into the recreation center now, before any redevelopment takes place. Examples include:

- fund a small, local coffee-shop to pop-up at the recreation center with a food truck or mobile kiosk
- host fitness classes of interest to residents using outdoor space, including the parking lot
- establish mobile city services that can be provided on-site for residents to early access



engage

Takoma Park

CONTACT US

Engage Takoma Park

<https://engage.takomaparkmd.gov/>

Samira Cook Gaines (City of Takoma Park)

samiraCG@takomaparkmd.gov

Brick & Story (Engagement Consultant)

hello@brickandstory.com